

Small Farms, Cash Crops, Agrarian Ideals, and International Development

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This address is an exploration of a lifetime of disparate and often conflicting observations about how different people view what is right and good for agriculture, food, and farmers around the world. The exploration utilizes the concept of wicked problems to focus on the issue of differing historical interpretations of global agricultural development. Sandra Batie defines wicked problems as “dynamically complex, ill-structured, public problems” for which “there can be radically different views and understanding of the problem by different stakeholders, with no unique ‘correct’ view.” The wicked problem construct is applied to four core ideas in the history of agricultural development—small farms, cash crops, agrarian ideals, and international development—to demonstrate the potential for using this concept to approach complex problems of historical interpretation and contribute to solutions to the challenges of global agricultural development. The author suggests historians should acknowledge contradictory interpretations and work toward reconciliation and synthesis, where it is possible and, where not, toward a clear explication of the basis for remaining differences. The author also encourages historians to seek multidisciplinary research opportunities that will help bring insights about historical context to policy deliberations.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO take up subjects that don't necessarily lend themselves to the careful construction used for

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research questions that can be approached with standard methods and presumably lead to definite results and conclusions. In that spirit, this address is an exploration of a lifetime of disparate and often conflicting observations about how different people view what is right and good for agriculture, food, and farmers around the world.

Probably some of the impetus, and fodder, for this exploration is the human experience of aging—a new generation is questioning the ideals I embraced in my own younger years. Trying to remain open-minded to these questions is disorienting, invigorating, and challenging. Add to this mix that I've spent nearly my entire career immersed in a discipline for which I did not train, and it probably comes as little surprise that as I try to reconcile widely differing interpretations and solutions, I find more questions than answers. And rather than try to present any positive resolution to these questions, I've decided instead to lay out some of the central dilemmas I've identified in trying to make sense of the problems of global agriculture.

Having now warned you that I am engaging in the prerogatives of both high office and advancing age, I can reassure you that I have a form and discipline to apply to this presentation that I hope will transform my exploratory ramblings from the eccentric to the useful—you will all have to make up your own minds about my success on that score at the end.

I want to start by introducing a concept that has recently come to my attention through the agricultural and applied economics literature, although I believe it is one that has longer usage in other disciplines. As far as I know, it has not yet been introduced to history. This is the concept of "wicked problems"; a construct framed most recently by Sandra Batie, an agricultural and resource economist at Michigan State University. Wicked problems, as Batie defines them, are "dynamically complex, ill-structured, public problems." They "always occur in a social context, and there can be radically different views and understanding of the problem by different stakeholders, with no unique 'correct' view. Thus, their wicked nature stems not only from their . . . complexity but also from multiple stakeholders' perceptions of them." They are also sometimes known as "social messes." They stand in contrast to "tame problems," which "can be clearly delineated and solved by experts . . . using the analytical approaches of their disciplines." Tame problems may be "complex and difficult," but they lend themselves to solutions with which there is little fundamental disagreement.²

Although Batie applied these definitions in the context of economics and social science policy analysis, I find the concept tremendously appealing when trying to sort through the evidence and meaning of contradictory historical interpretation of human experience. Historians also face wicked and tame problems. Tame problems might include the chronological reconstruction of a set of events—the problem is clearly delineated and in most cases can be solved using the standard methods of historical research. Wicked problems, on the other hand, include interpretation of the meaning of momentous events in the trajectory of change over time. I find the history of global agricultural development fraught with these kinds of wicked problems.

Batie offers a series of recommendations to help guide applied economists along a new path to approaching research on wicked problems. She advocates, among other things, more engagement with stakeholders as an “honest broker” of differing ideas and perspectives and increased grounding in historical and social contexts. These approaches might suggest some new ideas for historians as well, I think. But I’ll return to that later.

Two recent historical interpretations of American policy regarding food and agricultural development assistance during the latter half of the twentieth century have been in my mind as I prepared this address. The first is the article by Jacqueline McGlade, “More a Plowshare than a Sword: The Legacy of US Cold War Agricultural Diplomacy” in the winter 2009 issue of *Agricultural History*; the second is the presentation by Sarah Phillips, “From Food Aid to the FAO: George McGovern and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism,” at the 2009 Organization of American Historians meeting just held in Seattle. These two pieces represent divergent interpretations, McGlade quite positive about US policy and Phillips quite critical. They also represent the historical contexts invoked by advocates involved in current policy debates of the clearly “wicked problem” of how the United States should play its role in addressing world hunger, poverty, and agricultural production.³

I do not mean to single out these two authors as the proponents of opposing interpretations of the United States’ role in post–World War II global food aid and agriculture development. They are simply two recent examples that I can point to reflecting a powerful divergence of views that is influencing current policy debates, both deeply grounded in his-

torical interpretation. Other examples abound, although most are less directly engaged in identifying and understanding historical antecedents. The particular significance of these two pieces was that they catalyzed my thinking about how such different views could arise from study of the same past.

Finally, let me provide a brief explanation of the title of this address. As I've noted, I have been puzzling through the myriad issues associated with making historical sense of current food and agriculture challenges for some time now. Always I keep coming back to four core ideas that seem to dominate the debate and encapsulate the divergent views—small farms, cash crops, agrarian ideals, and international development: small farms, as a reflection of the decline or progress of farming systems; cash crops, as the source of success or ruin for food production systems; agrarian ideals, as the basis for vitality or stagnation in rural life; and international development, as the reflection of positive or negative outcomes of twentieth-century agricultural globalization. Of course, these are exaggerated dichotomies, but they express the contradictions inherent in historical and social science research and interpretation of the late twentieth century and reflect the extent to which analysis of global agricultural development, including its history, is, at heart, a wicked problem.

I'll begin with small farms as a reflection of the decline or progress of farming systems. This apparent dichotomy poses the question—is the historical decline in the prevalence of small farms a symbol of positive change or of loss? Jane Adams's *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890–1990* or Pete Daniel's *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880*, among many others, make a convincing case that something of irreplaceable value has been lost—a culture of family and neighborhood ties, a close relationship with natural cycles and the connection between work and results, and for some, although clearly not all, a form of economic and political independence.⁴

On the other hand, the work of many of my colleagues in economics conveys a different view, both in current studies of the values of trade and globalization or in back issues of the *Journal of Farm Economics*, where much of the economics underlying New Deal and later US agricultural policies took shape. This research makes clear that both overall economic gains and benefits to individuals through higher standards of living

and the opportunities offered by complex urban societies have accompanied the structural change described by writers like Adams and Daniel.

I don't expect to resolve this question; I merely note its existence at the core of debates about the appropriate structure for agriculture—in the United States and elsewhere. I would identify it as one of the “wicked problems” of agricultural policy in which historical studies are deeply engaged.

So, what makes small farms a wicked problem, besides clear and hard-to-resolve differences of view? For one thing—definition. In the United States, small farms have generally been relatively large, by world standards, and associated with ownership and independence, self-sufficiency and production of surpluses for the market—but of course, not always and not in every place. And their size and other characteristics have changed over time. According to current official definitions, most small farms are part-time operations (generally retirement farms or rural residences where the operator's primary occupation is not farming), although what I think is for many the image of the “true” small farm is closer to the subset of small farms made up of full-time operations with sales under \$250,000—a category of American farms whose numbers continue to decline.⁵

In other parts of the world, farms the size of US small farms would be considered quite large. Average farm size in India, for example, remains around three acres (1.18 hectares), although, of course, an average in such a large and diverse country masks huge differences. The differences are significant for framing both the issues posed by the changing structure of agriculture and its solutions. When we ask the question of whether preservation of small farm structures should be a goal of agricultural policy, do we mean the same thing for two-hundred-acre US farms that we mean for three-acre farms in India or elsewhere?⁶

There are, indeed, other complexities surrounding the question of small farms and whether observers view their decline as tragedy or triumph—for example, their significance as residences and sources of food production, their existence as evidence of inequities in landholding and traditions of land inheritance, their role in patterns of independence and self-sufficiency or persistent poverty. All of these are subject to “radically different views and understanding of the problem by different stakeholders, with no unique ‘correct’ view”—making this a classic wicked problem, for historians as much as for other social scientists.⁷

The dichotomy I've observed in the interpretations of the next in my series of core ideas in the history of global agricultural development is that cash crops have been either the source of success for food production systems or the source of their ruin (in the sense of destroying the capacity of farmers to feed themselves and contributing to poverty and migration out of agriculture). As with small farms, the term has multiple meanings, depending on the time, place, and interpretive orientation of its users.

The term "cash crops" can denote the ties to markets of independent producers, who may sell a surplus of family food crops in good years or plant a commodity intended for sale rather than personal use. Historical studies of frontier agriculture and of farming in isolated regions frequently describe the first of these two types of market ties. Much historical interpretation of the development of production specifically for markets is associated with the US transition to a market economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The economic development literature of the 1960s and 1970s also addresses a similar kind of transition a century or more later through studies of the value of encouraging small-scale cash crop production by peasant smallholders, both as a national food production strategy and rural poverty reduction policy.⁸

These latter studies, however, often document post-colonial efforts to redevelop a viable peasant agriculture in the aftermath of large-scale, export-oriented colonial agriculture that put cash crop production ahead of food production. Interpretations of the role of cash crops in agriculture also have evoked a negative image of landlords and creditors who require that farmers produce crops with cash value to assure repayment of loans and a profit from the sale of the commodity, as in the historical literature on sharecropping in the United States. An updated version of this critique can be seen in emerging work on the Green Revolution. These more recent studies identify the pressure to focus on commercial production of bulk commodities over household food production—a source of structural change that has created landlessness and poverty, and while reducing starvation, has not ended hunger.⁹

So what is the perplexing question involving cash crops that identifies it as a "wicked problem" for historians? Identifying where, when, and how cash crops are beneficial or detrimental certainly presents a "dynamically complex and ill-structured"—wicked—problem that has bred diverse

perspectives with no "unique correct views." Having first trained as a historian in the early 1970s, I am well-versed in the discourses regarding western colonialism, the literature on the abuses of the sharecropping system, and the more general critique of the market economy and the damaging effects of the transition to capitalism. Yet at the same time, although there are ample discussions of this transition that indict the market economy's impact on traditional agricultural structures, there is also a strong literature in economic history and agricultural and trade economics that describes positive effects of integration with markets. This literature links the transition with systematic economic development that leads to a strong, diversified economy able to support growing populations.

A clear expression of this wicked problem occurs in a current contestation over cash crop production. This example is Oxfam's call for an end to US cotton subsidies on behalf of West African cotton farmers, which offers an apparent contradiction between the critique of the damages wrought on food production and small-scale agriculture by the promotion of commercial cash crops and the recognition of the benefits that the sale of these crops can bring to farming households. Leaving aside the issue of the subsidies, which is outside the scope of this particular wicked problem (although likely a wicked problem of its own) the West African cotton cause is premised on the vital importance of cash from small-scale cotton production to meet the needs of poor farm families for education, medical care, and investment in food production. But this cotton production is only small-scale at the production level—the processing and export segments of the industry are mostly controlled by national-level enterprises and government. So in the interests of preserving small-scale agriculture and food production, it becomes necessary to promote the continued production of an export-oriented commercial crop that is highly integrated into the international market economy.¹⁰

I'll leave the preceding topic a bit unresolved and move on to the next in my series of core ideas. Agrarian ideals are a topic that draws me back again and again. In preparing this talk, I reread David Danbom's 1991 presidential address on twentieth-century American romantic agrarianism and was reminded of why that might be. Having come of age in the early 1970s, I embraced the back-to-the-land movement of that era. I own a copy of *Five Acres and Independence: A Handbook for Small Farm*

Management and Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanely and Simply in a Troubled World, as well as the entire *Foxfire* series. My husband (then boyfriend) had a subscription to *Organic Gardening* and visited the Rodale farm. We had friends who lived in communes and had made our own plans to find a way to live self-sufficiently on an Appalachian farm. In the end, we found our way to professions in agriculture, and although we actually do live on five acres, it is far too rocky to support even minimal independence—even if I could face all that weeding and canning. The hill farm out of which our property was carved was a self-sufficient Appalachian farm at one time, but it and the other farms in our hollow held closer to forty, or more, acres to meet the needs of their families.¹¹

All of this is simply to suggest that the “different views and understanding” that underlie wicked problems may be held not only by different groups of stakeholders—individual stakeholders may themselves sometimes hold multiple, even ambiguous, views. I love my rural life and pay a big price for it in my daily four- to six-hour round-trip commute. At the same time, my training and experience raise questions about whether the agrarian focus on small-scale traditional systems fully considers the needs of global food production.

The wicked problem here, I think, is whether agrarian ideals, be they of the political stripe of Jeffersonian agrarianism or the cultural stripe of the southern agrarians or the rational stripe of agricultural fundamentalists or the romantic stripe of the back-to-the-landers, encompass a workable alternative to modern commercial agriculture in meeting global food needs. Otto Doering, an agricultural economist with distinct historical sensitivities, put the problem quite succinctly in an introduction he wrote to a collection of articles in the spirit of the then recently published *Small is Beautiful; Economics As If People Mattered*. Doering cautioned those who would assume that the proposed new scales (and here I am jumping sections and conflating small farms with agrarian ideals), because they were perceived as good, should be easily achieved. Doering noted that there was a need to understand first how and why the structures currently in place came to be, before we could be certain of how to change them:

Many of those who are convinced that small is beautiful are also sure that they know the path to small scale enterprise and appropriate technology.

One's own values may lead to adopting or shunning a “small is beautiful”

ethos; this is a matter of individual choice. However, firm believers must be disabused of the notion that there is a straight path and that they know the route. If we do not even know where we are today, how can we be sure of where we will be tomorrow? It is clear that our homework is cut out for us.

Here is an invitation to historians to participate in confronting a wicked problem—although it comes to us from a previous incarnation of the problem, the questions remain the same and there have been an additional thirty-five years of historical experience on which to draw for insights. This question, though complex, seems to me excellently suited to the methods Batie advises for wicked problems, especially engagement with stakeholders and reference to historical and social contexts.¹²

And now I reach the fourth, and final, core idea I want to discuss—international development. I have framed this dichotomy to reflect the contradiction I introduced early in this talk, the contradiction evident in the article by Jacqueline McGlade and the presentation by Sarah Phillips that I've used to represent positive and negative views of the trajectory of international development during the twentieth century.

I want to bring back Batie's definition of wicked problems again for a moment, to provide a marker as we begin considering this last topic, since I want to emphasize it as the most wicked of the problems I've presented and the one toward which the other three point, at least in the way I've constructed them here. The questions of international development, whether from the perspective of understanding them historically or as current policy problems, most certainly meet the threshold of being "dynamically complex, ill-structured, public problems." They "occur in a social context, and there can be radically different views and understanding of the problem by different stakeholders, with no unique 'correct' view. Thus, their wicked nature stems not only from their . . . complexity but also from multiple stakeholders' perceptions of them." She adds that they are also sometimes known as "social messes"—it's hard to imagine a better term for the debate surrounding globalization and international development; sometimes jargon can hit the nail right on the head!

So what is the wicked problem or perplexing question on international development? I'd like to return to the Green Revolution, which I mentioned briefly in my discussion of cash crops. As I said, I came of age in the 1970s, amidst a global food crisis in many ways similar, at least rhe-

torically, to the one we face today. We had seen horrifying pictures of worldwide famine and heard dire predictions of the likely effects of population growth on world food supplies, as well as the imminent end to cheap energy. We had also absorbed the lessons of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and helped to organize the first Earth Day in response to critiques of the weight of our materially indulgent lifestyles on the health of the planet.

But the Green Revolution was not couched in environmental terms—it was presented as a miracle of modern agricultural science and evidence that we could solve virtually any problem through the creative application of good minds. Early critiques came from the perspective of the population displacements and disrupted rural communities that resulted from the structural change attendant on introduction of capital and input-intensive agriculture to cultures with very large, and poor, agricultural work forces. Later came critiques based on the environmental and health effects of the irrigation and chemical inputs required for the high-yielding varieties that were the centerpiece of the productivity growth of the Green Revolution.

The wicked problem arises in the juxtaposition of these two critiques and the original expectations and continued defense of these programs as effective means of avoiding widespread hunger or starvation. Many stakeholders have viewed and still view the Green Revolution as a program of international development aid grounded in the best intentions to fight world hunger. It used the tools the West had so aptly applied to increase its own productivity and fuel the prosperity of a diversified, urban-based economy and apparently solved the immediate problem of adequate food production for a burgeoning population, particularly in India. Equally strong have been interpretations by others that it was, at best, a misguided effort to transfer the agricultural structures of the developed world to an unprepared traditional farming system with detrimental effects on rural communities and the livelihoods of very small-scale farm families. At worst, these critics see it as evidence of self-serving efforts by developing countries to create new markets both for agricultural inputs and for consumer goods in newly industrialized urban centers.

Historical research is only beginning to systematically address the tangle of the Green Revolution. Some of the threads involve the political currents of the Cold War; others involve the problem of surplus farm

commodities, particularly in the United States. The multiplicity of views on this effort to address global agricultural production and hunger, coupled with the urgency of calls for a new Green Revolution or for alternative approaches, make this a wicked problem that demands immediate attention. Can historians sift through these events soon enough to contribute context and perspective—and even new ideas for change—to the renewed effort to invest in global agricultural development?

“What is to be done?” I hope you will excuse this lifting of a question posed by Lenin in the early days of the twentieth century, who, it must be said, was not afraid to address wicked problems. Remembering this quotation regrounds me in the earliest years of my interest in finding solutions to the problems of the world—at that point problems I had learned of in *The Weekly Reader* (some of you may remember that 1960s fount of elementary school-level current events). I quickly rejected the solutions posed by Lenin and other revolutionaries, but I have never lost my belief that we must seek solutions.

So I will return to the wicked problems construct and share with you the method Batie describes for addressing them and how historians might apply that method to their own work and use it as a vehicle for engaging directly with the policy research community.

In essence, according to Batie, approaching wicked problems, or social messes, requires adopting a “postnormal science” framework—one that moves beyond a “curiosity-driven, disciplinary-based” model to one of engagement with stakeholders, cooperation among disciplines, and significantly for historians, attention to “social and historical contexts surrounding policy formulation.” Batie points out that the postnormal science framework for approaching wicked problems recognizes “potential trade-offs associated with problem solving” and notes that “identification of solutions becomes as much a social and political process as it is a scientific endeavor.”¹³

I’d like to suggest that there is much we as historians can learn from this construct and much we can do to contribute to an engaged, multi-disciplinary, postnormal science framework for addressing the wicked problems of global agricultural development. We could start by acknowledging the contradictions within our own research and interpretations of historical experience, ideally working toward a more holistic integration of these contradictions where synthesis is possible and toward a clearer

definition of the sources and meaning of these contradictions, where synthesis is not possible. Beyond this effort, we might adapt the postnormal science method to our own work by enhancing the role of oral history as a means of "engaging stakeholders" and seeking out multi-disciplinary research opportunities or publishing outlets that challenge our own orientations to the study of history and bring insights about historical context to policy deliberations.

In closing, I just want to return to my opening very briefly. I noted that some of the inspiration for this talk has come from my recently achieved status of middle age. This gives me a perspective that I'm sure my children have already tired of hearing about—one that I now realize was wisdom when I heard it from my own mother. But I'll take the chance of offering it now in a way that I hope will seem wise. As I look at the changing interpretations of events I witnessed or experienced myself, I want to suggest that we guard against too easily dismissing the motives or understanding of those who came before. I don't advocate always keeping old ideas (though I do—now—advocate keeping old idea holders!). However, I want to ask historians as they develop new interpretive frameworks to acknowledge that while perhaps now-recognized negative outcomes from earlier policy decisions overshadow the positives, having meant well counts for something. Even if it only reminds us that human decision-making is complex, as are the outcomes from it, and that our own good motives may also bear mistaken fruit.

Having said that let me also add that I have been delighted to see the tremendous new energy that has come to the field of agricultural history with the renewed interest in food policy and sustainable development. Whatever my own conflicted views of the historical interpretations arising out of these new interests, and despite the intractability of many of the issues at the center of this work, I think there is no denying that wicked problems inspire challenging and rewarding research.

NOTES

1. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Economic Research Service or the US Department of Agriculture.
2. Sandra S. Batie, "Wicked Problems and Applied Economics," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 90 (Dec. 2008): 1176–91.
3. Jacqueline McGlade, "More a Plowshare than a Sword: The Legacy of US Cold War Agricultural Diplomacy," *Agricultural History* 83 (Winter 2009): 79–102; Sarah T. Phillips,

"From Food Aid to the FAS: George McGovern and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism," Organization of American Historians Conference, Seattle, Wa., Mar. 2009.

4. Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890–1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

5. Robert A. Hoppe and James M. MacDonald, "America's Diverse Family Farms: Assorted Types, Sizes, and Situations," *Economic Research Service AIB769*, USDA (May 2001).

6. "Country Profile: India," *New Agriculturalist: online*, <http://www.new-ag.info/99-3/countryp.html> (accessed June 11, 2009).

7. Batie, "Wicked Problems," 1176.

8. For a nice discussion of the difference between producing for the market and selling surplus production, see, Mary Beth Pudur, "The Limits of Subsistence: Agriculture and Industry in Central Appalachia," *Agricultural History* 64 (Winter 1990): 61–89. A good synthesis of this work can be found in Richard Lyman Bushman, "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 55 (July 1998): 351–74. For a good example of this type of study, see, Eric S. Clayton, "Small Scale Cash Crop Production in a Developing Economy," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 9 (July 1961): 618–24.

9. This critique exists primarily outside the historical literature at this point, although it can be found in some of the literature of environmental history because of the heavy dependence of Green Revolution practices on manufactured inputs. Critiques in the development literature point to the dependence on credit and capital investment and the reduction in labor as disruptive to rural employment and community structures. See, for example, D. W. Norman, "Farming Systems Research to Improve the Livelihood of Small Farmers," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 65 (Dec. 1978): 813–18; Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, "Sociology of Development," in *21st Century Sociology: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2007).

10. For the Oxfam position on this issue, see, Julian M. Alston et al., "Impacts of the Reductions in US Cotton Subsidies on West African Cotton Producers," Research Report Oxfam America, June 21, 2007, publication summary at <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/impacts-of-reductions-in-us-cotton-subsidies-on-west-african-cotton-producers/> (accessed Sept. 7, 2009). For a good discussion of the structure of the cotton industry in French West Africa, see, Louis Goreux and John Macrae, "Reforming the Cotton Sector in Sub Saharan Africa," *Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 47* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003) at <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/wps/wp47.pdf> (accessed Sept. 20, 2009).

11. David B. Danbom, "Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America," *Agricultural History* 65 (Fall 1991): 1–14.

12. E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful; Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Otto C. Doering III, "Introductory Comments to Appropriate Technology for US Agriculture: Are Small Farms the Coming Thing?" *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 60 (May 1978): 293–94.

13. Batie, "Wicked Problems," 1176, 1180, 1187.

Agricultural History Talks to Anne Effland

Q. Tell us something about your past. What drew you to agricultural history?

I love this story because of the way it draws my life together—like the tapestry allusion in my favorite Carole King song. I'm not sure when I fell in love with all things rural, but I think it had something to do with my grandmother, a died-in-the-wool Connecticut Yankee who recited Robert Frost to us and left her *Yankee* magazine lying around with beautiful centerfolds of New England country scenes. When my parents moved us to western Maryland, my affinity for the country blossomed in the foothills of the Appalachians. We camped at Shenandoah National Park, where I discovered the old mountain homesteads, most ruined along the wooded walking paths, but at least one of them being newly interpreted in the late 1960s National Park Service awakening to the social history of that park and others. I later read Catherine Marshall's *Christy*, which sympathetically portrayed the life and poverty of the southern Appalachian mountaineers, further firing my romantic imagination.

During high school, I volunteered to learn and demonstrate Appalachian mountain crafts as an apprentice to an elderly mountain couple at Catoctin Mountain National Park. I learned to spin and weave, quilt, cook on a wood stove, and make apple butter over an open fire, as well as work a broom-making machine, produce shaved wooden shingles, and make pottery from locally sourced clay. Disappointingly, we were not taught how to run the still interpreted on the other side of the park. I also had the chance to work as a youth representative to the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland's anti-poverty work in Appalachia, which included the opportunity to travel to the southern Appalachians to learn about and participate in some of the exciting work being supported by both the more liberal mainstream churches and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Some of the rural connections of my late teens and early adult life are chronicled in my presidential address, but on the academic side,

I discovered Paul Wallace Gates in a class on Reconstruction and the Gilded Age. Left to my own devices in choosing my paper topics, I had chosen to explore the land policies of the frontier West and planned an honors thesis comparing the Indian policies of the United States and Canada. Those who know me may well recognize my penchant for overly ambitious projects, and like others of those I have imagined in my past, this one never came to fruition. Instead, I married and moved to West Virginia and began a more serious path towards agriculture. I was lucky enough to find employment in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection, where I focused on issues of rural women and labor as I pursued a master's in history. We also found a rural home to rent and had our first real farming experiences—growing a garden in thick clay soil and raising chickens in a makeshift pen that turned out to be easily accessible to raccoons. I gained a tremendous amount of respect for those who could grow and preserve their own food and lost some of my romantic notions about life on the land.

My husband's studies in soil science eventually took us to Iowa State University, where ironically we moved to town. In fact, although I loved the agricultural surroundings of Ames and the Midwest, I intended to move away from rural studies to focus on women's history and had no intentions of attending graduate school at Iowa State. But then I met Dorothy Schwieder, Deborah Fink, and Valerie Grim through a women's history link, and they slowly encouraged me toward the PhD program in Agricultural History and Rural Studies. After a long conversation with Dick Lowitt, I took the plunge and have never looked back. I have always seen that choice as one of those moments that joined the threads of a long-developing pattern in my life so neatly that now I can't imagine ever having done anything else.

Q. As a non-academic, please tell us about your day job and how it uses your academic knowledge and experience.

My day job is part of the longer story I've just described, in that I launched into my career at USDA expecting to be a research agricultural historian functioning similarly to an academic but with an applied policy aspect to my job rather than teaching. But much changed soon after I joined the Economic Research Service (ERS), and my job has strayed much further from the research historian model than I ever could have imagined. No longer officially an historian, I apply my academic

knowledge and experience less directly than I would have had my position remained as it began. But I also have had the opportunity to function more directly in the policy arena than most historians and have greatly developed my interest and skill with policy history.

As a specialist in US agricultural policy, my work is a combination of applied social science research, internal policy analysis, and communication of the knowledge derived from all this to policymakers, academics, journalists, and more general audiences. I am fortunate to also be involved with international agricultural policy organizations that allow me the opportunity to analyze US policy in a global context—and to travel to international meetings to discuss policy design and measurement of support. While most of this does not appear to draw directly on my academic knowledge and experience as an historian, in fact that background bears heavily on my own insights and approach to the work. Years of study and thinking about policy history have afforded me a long view and nuanced sense of the policy landscape. My approaches to policy problems are different, broader, more likely to consider contingent possibilities, political, social, and cultural contexts, and antecedents. The questions I bring to research design and interpretations reflect a different orientation from most of my colleagues.

Of course, I do also use my historical training very directly in some cases—in response to specific historical questions, for presentations on the historical antecedents of current policy, for particular occasions or anniversary events, and for speechwriting. And I try to always have some historical research in the works for my own satisfaction and the occasional opportunity to contribute directly to policy analysis.

Q. What is your current work project?

I am a hopelessly unfocused multi-tasker, so answering this question is a bit hard. I have ongoing work related to analyzing and measuring the level and makeup of US domestic support to the agriculture sector and to following United States' and international debates on farm policy design. I am also involved in several research projects on particular aspects of policy design, related to both impacts on producer and farm household decisionmaking and on consumer/citizen concerns.

Among the more historically oriented projects I have underway, a colleague and I are investigating the connections between conservation and ecological thought in the origins of agri-environmental policy and continue to work on a synthetic analysis of developments in agriculture,

rural communities, and policy in the twentieth century. I am also trying to complete a paper on an early example of public-private partnerships in government-supported agricultural research based on interviews with a group of current and retired scientists at one of the USDA regional research laboratories. And I continue to have irons in the fire on women landowners, rural minorities, and farm labor.

Q. What advice would you give graduate students and recent graduates who might be looking for employment in today's difficult economic climate?

Having sought my first employment during earlier unpromising economic times, I very early adopted an approach to my job search based on finding, not the "perfect" job, but a fulfilling path through life. I have spent my career combining professional, vocational choices with personal ones and the outcome has been a fantastically varied and tremendously gratifying whole. So out of this experience, I would say flexibility and openness to new and unanticipated directions in your career are more likely to yield good results over the long term than any particular strategy. I think it also helps to recognize your own core interests as you move into employment from graduate school and possibly later from job to job. When my job at USDA changed, I realized that the agriculture focus was more important to me than the history, though I would have and still do prefer the two combined.

It is unfortunate that the academy can sometimes appear to endorse an academic career as the best measure of quality and success for graduate students. In other disciplines, working outside the academy, particularly in research institutions, is very highly respected, and many outside the academy highly value historians' abilities. We are trained to think clearly and logically through a problem and to integrate a wide variety of sources into a usable basis for understanding issues or events. I would strongly urge historians to consider non-academic jobs in their employment search—there are very satisfying career paths out there and real opportunities to make a difference in the world.

Q. As a non-academic, what roles have academic work, conferences, and friends played in your life and what challenges have you faced to keep them there?

I have been fortunate in that my non-academic job is in a research institution. My job is classified as research based, albeit with an applied

focus, and publishing original research is core to the work. Our managers are themselves researchers and they understand the value of professional development and thus continue to support travel to conferences. I am especially fortunate that my disciplinary orientation as an historian has continued to be respected with support for both travel to conferences and publishing.

Conferences and friends have played two key roles for me—one as a stable connection to my past, the other as a training ground for my future. Remaining involved in the AHS and other professional historians' organizations has been a lifeline for me to remain connected to my academic training and intended career path and to my friends in the field. Becoming involved in the Rural Sociological Society, the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, and the International Trade Research Consortium has offered me the opportunity to develop competence and confidence in new areas of work and to develop new professional networks and friendships.

In many respects, the special circumstances of my position have been a benefit to my career and personal development by pushing me to expand my horizons far beyond my early training. But I wouldn't want to suggest it has been an easy path—although I have not faced insurmountable barriers, it is a difficult experience to rebuild confidence and competence in a new field after having already completed graduate education in another.

Q. How do you think the Agricultural History Society can keep its recruitment broad and its intellectual vistas open?

I believe the journal in particular is key to maintaining the intellectual breadth of the society and the annual meeting to maintaining strong recruitment. The journal defines the boundaries of the society's intellectual life—if it is broad in its focus and deep in its commitment to quality historical research, the society will remain a strong organization of scholars who share a commitment to rigorous historical study of agriculture and rural life, whatever their disciplinary home. The annual meetings provide the opportunity for professional and social networking that makes the society an organization people want to belong to—when hard choices must be made about limiting professional memberships, I believe it is the personal connections that will encourage many to consider AHS indispensable. In combination, a strong journal and a strong meeting will

offer venues for broadening and strengthening the society and the field of agricultural and rural history.

I believe that these two strong aspects of our society are already working to encourage a broad and active membership, but I would also like to extend a warm welcome to any who have not yet become involved in AHS to join us. Please contact the journal or our business office or any of our officers or Executive Committee members, to indicate your interest in the society and join us at our next annual meeting at Rollins College.